

Hidden Homelessness

Life in a small town may seem idyllic. But the same factors that contribute to family homelessness in other parts of the country are at play in rural communities, where smaller populations and fewer resources can create greater challenges. Advocates refer to those experiencing rural homelessness as “the hidden homeless.”

“We have a lot of the same issues as other Affiliates,” says Sherry Arey, executive director



Ryan, Chelsea, and their two children are happy in their new home and optimistic about the future after working with Family Promise of Hendricks County.

of Family Promise of Shenandoah County in Woodstock, VA, a town whose population barely exceeds 5,000. “But we also have unique situations because of our location.”

For example, transportation. Until this fall, the county had no public transportation and only one taxi service. In a county like Shenandoah that stretches over 500 square miles, very little is within walking distance. Insufficient transportation impedes access to support services, jobs, childcare, medical care, and more.

The Affiliate provided rides or cab fare for families when possible, but as Arey recalls, “It was hard if one person needed to be at work at one end of the county and someone else had an appointment at the opposite end at the same time.”

A lack of public transportation in Plainfield, IN, inspired a robust vehicle repair and donation program at Family Promise of Hendricks County, another rural Affiliate.

The county now has two more daycare centers that accept vouchers, but Arey says they can still be unaffordable for low-income families on a tight budget.

A lack of affordable housing, the leading cause of homelessness, is another obstacle in rural communities where there isn’t much housing to begin with. Family Promise of Hendricks County has increased access to housing by cultivating unique relationships with landlords.

“We’ll guarantee a tenant’s rent for a year if landlords rent to a Family Promise family,” Randall says. “We’ll even offer rent assistance for other tenants, if necessary, or update units or buy new appliances to secure housing. That’s just how desperate we are.”

Because they work with families to address the root causes of homelessness to ensure lasting stability, the Affiliate has never actually had to pay a full year’s rent for any family they’ve placed in housing. But Randall sees the plan as a way of limiting risk for landlords while optimizing the potential for success for families.

The benefits of these landlord relationships have a ripple effect in the community. For example, an individual who recently purchased a house in disrepair heard of Family Promise’s work on other rental units and proposed an arrangement where Family Promise could use the building for rentals if they agreed to fix it up first.

For rural communities, homelessness prevention is another way to address the crisis. Family Promise of Hendricks County rehoused 110 families last year but prevented homelessness for more than 600.

Says Randall, “Family Promise knows what it takes for families to create stability. We have story after story of families who have found success in this model.”

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OFFICE: 908-273-1100
EMAIL: info@familypromise.org
WEB: www.familypromise.org

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“When we came to Family Promise, I couldn’t smile or be myself, but now I can breathe. We finally have a place we can call home.”
— Family Promise graduate



A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

I grew up in the suburbs about two miles outside of a village of 300 people. My neighbors were farmers, factory workers, and people working in the small towns in our county.

This newsletter touches on three key elements that intersect with rural America. We look at how family homelessness is especially difficult in these communities. We talk about manufactured housing, in which many of my childhood friends lived, as the largest source of affordable housing without a subsidy in the country. And we explore the impact that upskilling can have through our partnership with Grow with Google.

This last is critical: Future Farmers of America was the most popular student organization in my high school, and more than half of my school’s graduates did not go on to college. In the 1980s, that meant you could still earn a good living; today, the toll of automation hits agrarian areas and small towns the hardest and has a devastating impact on employment and housing. At Family Promise, we know that since the future begins at home, having the stability and income to keep a home is essential.

Thank you,



Claas Ehlers

Highlighting our achievements in the fight against family homelessness

Family Promise: Growing with Google

Most people think of Google as an internet search tool, but to Jewel Williams, it’s something much more powerful: it’s a career move.

Working with Family Promise of Gainesville in Florida, Jewel, an office administrator, is taking advantage of a new partnership with Google to advance her career. She’s currently earning a certification in IT support, and although she hasn’t quite completed the course, her growing skill set has already earned her a raise at work.

This summer, Google donated 5,000 Google Career Certificate scholarships to Family Promise through its Grow with Google program to help guests, graduates, and others further their careers and earnings potential. Designed by Google, the Career Certificate Program provides access to in-demand jobs through rapid reskilling, without the need for a college degree or

“The Grow with Google partnership is a unique opportunity for employees or those seeking employment to increase their earning potential.”

prior experience, in the fast-growing fields of data analytics, project management, user experience (UX) design, and IT support. Participants learn at their own pace and can be job ready in six months.

“It’s a great opportunity to get ahead at work,” says Shari Jones, program manager at Family Promise of Gainesville, where Jewel



is one of ten people enrolled in the program (see sidebar on page 4).

The Affiliate is enhancing the Grow with Google program by collaborating with local colleges and vocational schools.

“If a student has turned to education to increase their income but they can’t afford rent, they probably can’t afford school either, and then they have to drop out,” notes Jones. “We’ve been able to help

several students continue their education by providing homelessness prevention assistance and giving them the chance to add to their resume.”

Jones says college students may even receive credit upon completion of certain certifications. She adds, “This partnership is a unique opportunity for employees or those seeking employment to increase their earning potential.”

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FAMILY PROMISE

FOUNDED IN 1988

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Claas Ehlers

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER:
Roberta Samuels

DESIGN: eminjay design

Family Promise is a national nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization addressing the crisis of family homelessness in the U.S. Through a comprehensive set of solutions involving prevention, shelter, and stabilization, Family Promise empowers families experiencing or at risk of homelessness to reclaim and maintain their independence.

HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

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Stories like Ryan and Chelsea’s in Indiana. Last winter, the couple and their son were sleeping in park restrooms, even as Chelsea was pregnant. A criminal record hampered their ability to find housing and employment. Family Promise helped Ryan find a steady job and worked with a landlord to get the family into a new home. Ryan and Chelsea continue to work toward stability, happy for the opportunity to build a secure life for their family.

Why I Give

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: JACK OSMOND

Innovative partnerships enable Family Promise to offer unique opportunities to families in its prograam. For example, collaborating with Hoboken, NJ-based Avocado Green Mattress, many families across the country receive high-quality organic mattresses when they move from shelter into housing.

At Family Promise Union County (FPUC) in Elizabeth, NJ, one young volunteer has taken this opportunity to the next level to help families receiving Avocado mattresses sleep even better on their new beds.



Jack Osmond (left, pictured with FPUC Manager of Volunteer Engagement Amy Jones) is making sure Family Promise families get a good night’s sleep.

Boy Scout Jack Osmond was searching for an Eagle Scout project when he learned about Family Promise. He was struck by the organization’s mission and wanted to

help. Upon learning the donated mattresses came without any supporting structure, Jack coordinated the building of custom bed frames for FPUC families.

The bed frames had to meet specific criteria. Avocado mattresses have unique dimensions. Also, the frames had to be designed to be easily assembled by one person and light enough to transport and store. Jack consulted contractors, handymen, and other scouts for his design. The frames are a neutral color that blends in with any décor and are slightly elevated to accommodate under-bed storage, which is practical in smaller living spaces.

“I wanted to put as much quality into the work as I could,” says Jack. “These families deserve to have nice furniture.”

“Every time I get into bed, I just love it! We all do!” says mom Dana, whose family has received several mattresses and frames.

Jack feels the experience has broadened his horizons.

“I learned a lot about family homelessness through this project,” he says. “It made me realize there’s so much to be done. Everybody has something they can contribute. I think that’s the best thing about volunteering – no contribution is too small.”

In Shenandoah County, a mom of three struggled with housing and employment. Family Promise put them in transitional housing, and within three weeks, the mom had enrolled her kids in school, obtained daycare for her youngest, and found work. A week later, the family moved into permanent housing through a Family Promise-landlord connection. Now, the kids are thriving in school, and mom’s doing well in her new job.

“The fact she could do all that in such a short time speaks volumes to the value of a safety net like Family Promise,” says Arey. “When you’re in crisis and your basic needs are met,

you can focus on moving forward no matter where you are.”



In Shenandoah County, VA, Family Promise’s community connections enabled one family to move from homelessness to stability within four weeks.

Family Promise Welcomes New Board Member



Stephen J. Wallace

, a partner at Nixon Peabody LLP, is one of the nation’s foremost authorities on the preservation of government-assisted housing. Over the past 30 years, he has been closely involved in the legislative and regulatory development of federal affordable housing preservation programs. Wallace is also

an adjunct professor at Georgetown Law School where he teaches a seminar course on affordable housing. His experience and insight in this area will be a valuable resource to Family Promise in its work to increase affordable housing opportunities for families battling poverty and homelessness.

Change the Future!

When Dana and her children found themselves homeless in the midst of a global health pandemic, the family slept in parks, in friends’ backyards, even in abandoned houses. But their stretch of homelessness came to an end when they found Family Promise.

Family Promise helped Dana with transportation and meals and tapped its extensive network of local landlords to move the family into an apartment. A

national partnership with Avocado Green Mattress and the ingenuity of a local Boy Scout even ensured the family had comfortable beds in their new home (see *Why I Give* on page 2). Now, Dana and her family are steadily regaining stability, working with Family Promise on budgeting and planning.

For the children, the home has been life changing. They have bedrooms, a yard to play in, and reliable internet for school.

But perhaps the most significant changes are the things no one can see. Like how Dana’s oldest daughter got ready for her high school prom in her own room. Or how the family snuggles together on the sofa to watch movies. Or how the children are happy and finally sleeping well.

“When we got to Family Promise, right away I started to see doors opening for me,” Dana says.

Donate and Save!

A special tax provision for the 2021 federal income tax return allows taxpayers to deduct up to \$600 in donations to qualifying charities (up to \$300 for individuals, \$600 for married couples filing joint returns). Ordinarily, people who choose to take the standard deduction cannot claim a deduction for their

charitable contributions, but a temporary law change permits them to claim this limited deduction on the 2021 federal income tax return. Check with the IRS or a tax preparer to see how this might benefit you.

Please change the future for children and families in need with a gift to Family Promise!

www.familypromise.org/
changethefuture



Clayton Donates 10th Home

Transitional housing is a supportive and temporary option aimed at bridging the gap from homelessness to permanent housing by offering structure, case management, and in some cases, education and training.

The home donation is part of a larger national partnership between Clayton and

Family Promise that works toward ending and preventing family homelessness. Through *A Future Begins at Home*, Family Promise and Clayton provide educational outreach and resource development, comprehensive case management, support services, transitional housing, and affordable housing solutions for graduate families.



Clayton CEO Kevin Clayton says, “By providing a home for families to use while they prepare for permanent housing, this donation helps local families get one step closer to housing stability and a place to call their own.”

“We’re thrilled to place this home right next to our day center, offering a safe space for families and providing them with additional assistance as they work toward stability,” says Beth Biggs, executive director of Family Promise of Baldwin County.

The donation expands the Affiliate’s transitional housing program to two homes.

GROWING WITH GOOGLE

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It also enhances the career development services Family Promise Affiliates can offer guests. So far, nearly 50 Affiliates have implemented the Grow with Google program, with new participants enrolling daily.



Grow with Google is enabling Family Promise graduate Jewel (right, pictured with her daughter) to advance her career.

GROWING WITH GOOGLE

JEWEL’S STORY

When Jewel came to Family Promise, she saw a wealth of opportunities and began working on budgeting, planning, and parenting skills. She was employed full-time and enrolled in Grow with Google with her eye on the future. Halfway to a certification in Technical Support Fundamentals, a six-month online course, she has already expanded her skill set enough to receive a raise at work.

Jewel says the program is challenging and time-consuming, so she’s learning soft skills like time management in addition to tech skills. She’s optimistic about her professional development.

“I’m hoping the IT program will either heighten my current position or shift me into a greater career,” she says.

MELINDA’S STORY

Melinda* was already employed when she and her family entered the shelter program at Family Promise Union County in Elizabeth, NJ. Melinda was looking to thrive in a career and saw an opportunity through Family Promise’s partnership with Grow with Google. She’s currently learning website and graphic design skills.

“I like that I can go at my own pace,” she says, “It keeps me motivated.”

Just weeks into the User Experience certificate program, Melinda already sees benefits.

“I’m able to do this even without prior experience,” she says. “This is important, and it helps to have Family Promise supporting me.”

*Name changed to protect privacy.

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